

Drawn to the Shadows: Does the Network Centrality of Government Actors Matter?

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Abstract

Network governance has been a predominant theme in policy implementation scholarship over the last decade. This focus is especially pertinent to “wicked” policy problems that require cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary coordination, such as those often found in environmental policy. Although the emergence of this research has been accompanied by remarkable conceptual and empirical development, there remains debate over how the relative centrality of government actors (i.e., the “shadow of hierarchy”) within governance networks is associated with network outcomes. Using survey and interview data collected among participants of U.S. marine aquaculture partnerships, we examine how the relative centrality of governmental actors in governance networks facilitates or inhibits coordination behaviors and learning among individual network actors. We operationalize both the “prestige” and degree of closeness that government actors are perceived to have by other actors within a network. We then test the extent to which these measures of network actor centrality are associated with an individual’s coordination behaviors and learning outcomes.